

Law & Gospel – Lutheran Life Luke 18:9-14 & 1 Corinthians 15:1-10

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is the Gospel? For that matter, what is the Law? As Lutherans we often talk about Law and Gospel as the most basic distinction that we must keep in mind when trying to understand the Bible. Our preaching, we say, must be Law & Gospel. The distinction between Law and Gospel is why we baptize, and why we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Law and Gospel is the basic foundation upon which we teach Bible Studies, do Catechesis, pre-marital pastoral care, funerals, and any pastoral care – whether privately or with a group. In fact the distinction of Law and Gospel is paramount to how not only Lutherans, but true Christians will live their daily lives.

What does God do and teach in the Law? He commands good works in thoughts, words, and deeds. In the Law He also condemns and punishes sin. What does God do and teach in the Gospel? The Gospel is the good news of our salvation in Christ Jesus. In the Gospel, God is doing the work – giving forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. To put this in the most simple terms, the Law is *always* about what man does, and the Gospel is *always* about what God does for man.

We commonly say there are three uses of the Law. First is the Curb – the law which controls violent outbursts of sin – like law enforcement, or parents. Second, the law is a mirror that shows us our sin and drives us to our metaphorical knees in repentance. And thirdly, the law is a guide to how Christians should live in obedience to God. Unfortunately, too often, this also drives people to repentance as 20/20 hindsight kicks in, for we have not loved God nor our neighbor as God requires. One thing is true about the Law, it *always* accuses!

Jesus tells a parable in our text about two people, both are confronted with the law in their lives. The Pharisee is confronted with the third use, he thinks he is following God's guide for Christian life – he *thinks* he has done all he should be doing. Only, he has not!

The tax collector was also confronted by the law, he knew of his sinfulness, he would not even lift his head toward heaven, but kept in penitentially bowed, and begged the mercy of God upon his sinfulness. Which one of the two was right before God? The one in the Gospel – the one begging, and therefore trusting, in God's mercy.

Dear friends, I know that some people get a little tired of the fact that during this time we call the sermon, each week I call you sinners, usually addressing a specific sin or sins. And that I then proclaim you forgiven in Christ.

Some believe that in such sermons, there is no Gospel. Some believe that I am supposed to tell you what you are to do to be good Christians *and that* they feel is the Gospel. It is not! That is the Law! I have people who have asked, "What do *I* need to do to make sure that I go to heaven." Such thinking is all Law! What must I do to get right with God, is a Law question – it is based upon my works, not Christ.

You want to know what to do to be saved? Here it is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”

What does Paul call the Gospel? *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

Lex semper accusat – the Law always accuses. If something relating to Christian faith and life points at you and me, telling us what to do, or claiming we did not do something, or did something we should not have done, that is the Law. You and I cannot save ourselves.

This is why God sent His Son Jesus Christ. God enfleshed Himself in the womb of Mary, conceived without sin. He was born and then lived the perfect life in thought, word, and deed that we cannot live. The wages of sin is death. As such, Jesus did not deserve to die. But, He is God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ – anointed to die – anointed to give His sinless life as the perfect sacrifice for sinners.

The Gospel is God doing for us, God giving to us His merciful gifts, the gifts Christ earned by His innocent suffering and death.

Christ purchased forgiveness upon the cross and delivers that forgiveness to us in Word and Sacrament.

In baptism, we are united to Christ’s death. We are washed in the cleansing flood of water which flows from the riven side of Christ. We are forgiven of all sins and by God’s grace made a member of His family. That is all Gospel! It is all Christ!

When we hear the Gospel proclaimed in the Absolution – whether privately or corporately – there is nothing left of our sins and guilt. Christ commanded that the Word of forgiveness be spoken, and at that proclamation, sins are forgiven. That same word of forgiveness is also proclaimed by Christ’s command in the sermon, for it is a preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Notice that it is always Law and Gospel! We are led to repentance for the forgiveness Christ purchased is delivered and showered upon us.

When we come to Christ’s table, we come because we know what we need, the law has already worked upon us. So, we come to eat of Christ’s body and drink of His blood. Why? Jesus told us that we do so for the remission of sins!

We could talk all day about what we should be doing and how we should be living our lives. You know what, I am sure you could do that very well. In fact, when we think of someone getting “preachy” with us, isn’t that what we think of? Someone who is preachy is someone who is

pointing out sins or who is talking about the rules we should be following. A fire and brimstone preacher is one who pointedly proclaims the Law.

But dear friends, it is the Gospel that saves. It is only in the Gospel that there is forgiveness of sins.

Which one of the men who went to the temple to pray went away justified? That is, which one went away in a right relationship with God? Was it the one who bragged about how good he was, in other words, the one who was all wrapped up in the Law? Or was it the one who came before God knowing he was unworthy, yet expecting great and merciful things, the things God would do for him and to him?

Each day we live our lives in Law and Gospel. Each day we rise and recognize our helplessness before God, asking Him to change us and make us like unto Him. And He does, for as we live each day in forgiveness that He purchased, relying upon it, expecting it, and rejoicing in it, we are made holy and perfect.

People I could tell you what you need to be doing to be good Christians. In fact, Satan would love me to get you to believe that it is all about what you do. Satan does not want you trusting the work of Christ. Satan does not want you hearing about what Christ did for your forgiveness. Satan does not want you to hear a word of forgiveness. And, he certainly does not want you to eat Christ's precious body and drink of His holy blood for the forgiveness of sins. He does not want you immersed in the Gospel, but he wants you to keep running to the law and trusting in yourself.

I am going to make Satan angry today, and every time you gather in this place. Oh, I may mention your sinfulness – in fact I may even make you feel guilty. OK, it is my goal in the sermon to make you feel like hell – literally – in fact, like you are so bad that eternal destruction is what you deserve.

But here is where that old wily foe will get real peeved. I am going to pick you up and carry you to the cross. I am going to proclaim to you Christ crucified, for I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. That He died to forgive you. That He called me to proclaim to you that you are forgiven. That He called me to feed you the very body and blood that purchased your forgiveness.

Dear friends, by the Gospel you are saved and heaven bound. You are forgiven in Christ! And forgiven and in Christ, you have eternal salvation and a new life in Him. Amen.